~~TITLE OF THE INVENTION~~

SYSTEM AND METHOD OF CONTENTS DISTRIBUTION, AND CONTENTS DISTRIBUTION APPARATUS

5   BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

[0001]   The present invention relates to a system and method of contents distribution, and a contents distribution apparatus. More particularly, the present invention relates to a system and

10   method of contents distribution which ~~is~~ are capable of appending conditions of use to contents to be distributed, e.g., video data and/or music data, and an apparatus used in such a system and method for distributing contents.

15   2. Description of the Background Art

[0002]   In recent years, services for distributing contents such as video data and/or music data to terminal devices, e.g., personal computers or mobile phones, have been launched. Such services can be generally classified into paid services (which allow

20   contents to be distributed only if a fee is paid previously or subsequently) and unpaid services (which allow contents to be distributed without requiring any sort of payments).

In a paid service, it is commonplace to prepare an alternative version for each content to be distributed. Such an

25   alternative version is typically prepared so as to include certain

image effects and/or sound effects (hereinafter referred to as "special effects") applied to the original content, but only to an extent where the effects still allow a subscriber to confirm the substance of the content. For this reason, such alternative

30   versions will hereinafter be referred to as "restricted contents". A restricted content will be provided to subscribers together with conditions of use for the original content (e.g., billing conditions regarding purchase of the content).

[0003]   FIG. 6 is a chart illustrating the construction of a

35   conventional contents distribution system and flows of contents distribution under a paid service.

In FIG. 6, a subscriber (terminal device) who desires to confirm the substance of a content before purchasing it (i.e., before paying a fee therefor) first obtains a restricted content

40   from a service provider (contents distribution apparatus) via a network. Thus, the subscriber may confirm the substance of the restricted content as well as the accompanying conditions of use (billing conditions). Then, if the subscriber wishes to purchase the content, the subscriber will satisfy the conditions of use,

45   and then newly obtain the original content from the service provider.

[0004]   However, under the above-described conventional contents distribution system, it is necessary for the service provider (i.e., the contents distribution apparatus) to retain

50   two versions for the same content, i.e., the original content and

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a restricted content. This essentially means the same content

being retained at the service provider in duplicate, which results

in a waste of memory resources of the contents distribution

apparatus.

55   On the part of the subscriber (i.e., the terminal device)

who wishes to purchase a content after previously confirming the

substance thereof, it is necessary to first obtain a restricted

content and then the original content. This essentially means

the same content being obtained ("downloaded") in duplicate. Thus,

60   extra communication time and costs are incurred by the subscriber

in order to obtain the two versions of the same content.

Furthermore, in the case where terminal devices having

different processing abilities with respect to special effects

are present within the same system, it is impossible to realize

65   an efficient contents distribution which accounts for the different

processing abilities of the terminal devices, because a restricted

content having the same data size will indiscriminately be

distributed to each terminal device.

[0005]   The aforementioned problems will arise unless separate

70   data is provided to accompany a content for distribution, where

the separate data being is used for applying or not applying special

effects to the content as desired by the service provider.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

75   [0006]   Therefore, an object of the present invention is to

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provide a system and method of contents distribution, which ~~realizes~~ realize an efficient use of the memory resources within a contents distribution apparatus and the communication resources on the part of a terminal device by appending data exclusively

80   concerning a special effect and information (management data) which is capable of controlling the special effect to an original content to be distributed, such that the data exclusively concerning special effect is adapted in accordance with the processing ability of the terminal device. Another object of the present invention

85   is to provide a contents distribution apparatus which can selectively control the application of a special effect to a distributed content in accordance with conditions of use that are stipulated for that content.

[0007]   The present invention has the following features to

90   attain the object above.

A first aspect of the present invention is directed to a contents distribution system for distributing a content including video and/or music data from a contents distribution apparatus to a terminal device via a network, . ~~wherein the~~ The contents

95   distribution apparatus comprises: a content storage section operable to store a content and specific data concerning a predetermined special effect to be applied to the content, where the content and the specific data ~~being~~ are stored as a pair; a content management data setting section operable to set management

100   data, ~~wherein~~ where the management data at least contains a flag

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indicating whether or not to apply the predetermined special effect to the content during reproduction, and conditions of use which need to be satisfied in order to reproduce the content without the predetermined special effect; and a transmission section

105 operable to transmit the content, the specific data, and the management data to the terminal device~~,~~. ~~wherein the~~ The terminal device comprises: a reception section operable to receive the content, the specific data, and the management data from the transmission section; and a reproduction control section operable

110 to reproduce the content with or without the predetermined special effect in accordance with the specific data and the presence or absence of the flag in the management data, and to reset the flag when the conditions of use contained in the management data are satisfied.

115 **[0008]** Thus, according to the first aspect, an original content and specific data associated with the original content are separately prepared, and the original content and the specific data are distributed to the terminal device together with management data which includes a flag indicating whether or not

120 to apply a special effect when the content is reproduced. As a result, the utility of memory resources in the contents distribution apparatus can be improved. In addition, the utility of communication resources on the part of the terminal device can be improved because, once a content is received, it is possible

125 to reproduce the content with or without a special effect as

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stipulated.

[0009]   In the contents distribution system, preferably, the specific data is special effects data which is generated based on information concerning a type of the predetermined special effect and a portion of the content to apply the predetermined special effect to~. and when When the flag indicates that the predetermined special effect must be applied, the reproduction control section in the terminal device reproduces the content by applying the special effects data to the content.

[0010]   Thus, by transmitting to the terminal device "special effects data", which does not require any additional processing for realizing special effects, it becomes possible even for a terminal device having a relatively low processing ability to reproduce the content with or without the special effect as stipulated.

[0011]   Alternatively, in the contents distribution system, preferably, the specific data is attribute data consisting of information concerning a type of the predetermined special effect and a portion of the content to apply the predetermined special effect to~. and when When the flag indicates that the predetermined special effect must be applied, the reproduction control section in the terminal device utilizes further data to generate special effects data in accordance with the type and the portion specified by the attribute data, where the further data being is previously stored in the reproduction control section for realizing special

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effects, and reproduces the content by applying the special effects data to the content.

[0012]   Thus, by transmitting to the terminal device small-sized "attribute data", which only specifies the type of the predetermined special effect and the portion of the content to apply the special effect to, and by allowing the terminal device to generate special effects data based thereupon, it becomes possible to efficiently utilize communication resources.

[0013]   In the contents distribution system, preferably, the contents distribution apparatus further comprises a content selection section operable to select, as the specific data, either special effects data which is generated based on information concerning a type of the predetermined special effect and a portion of the content to apply the predetermined special effect to, or attribute data consisting of the information concerning the type and the portion, such that the special effects data is selected for ~~said~~ a terminal device having a relatively low processing ability, and the attribute data is selected for ~~said~~ a terminal device having a relatively high processing ability~~,~~. ~~wherein,~~ ~~when~~ When the flag indicates that the predetermined special effect must be applied, the reproduction control section in ~~said~~ the terminal device having a relatively low processing ability reproduces the content by applying the special effects data to the content~~,~~. ~~and when~~ When the flag indicates that the predetermined special effect must be applied, the reproduction

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control section in ~~said~~ the terminal device having a relatively

high processing ability utilizes further data to generate special

effects data in accordance with the type and the portion specified

by the attribute data, where the further data ~~being~~ is previously

180   stored in the reproduction control section for realizing special

effects, and reproduces the content by applying the special effects

data to the content.

[0014]   Thus, since the contents distribution apparatus can

append either special effects data or attribute data to an original

185   content for distribution in accordance with the processing ability

of the terminal device, it is possible to construct an efficient

contents distribution system even if the system includes terminal

devices having different processing abilities with respect to

special effects.

190   [0015]   In this case, preferably, the content selection section

in the contents distribution apparatus selects the specific data

to be appended to the content based on processing ability

information which is supplied from the terminal device.

Thus, the system can dynamically adapt to situations

195   where a further terminal device(s) is added to the system, or where

the processing ability of the terminal device changes.

[0016]   The contents distribution apparatus may further

comprise a data storage section operable to store the management

data.

200   Thus, by storing the management data which has been set,

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it becomes possible to easily reuse the management data for other contents as well.

[0017]   Moreover, the contents distribution apparatus may further comprise a distribution content reproduction confirmation section operable to reproduce, for confirmation, the content with or without the predetermined special effect in accordance with the flag in the management data set by the content management data setting section.

Thus, it becomes possible at the contents distribution apparatus to confirm how a content will be reproduced in accordance with the management data which is set by the content management data setting section.

[0018]   A second aspect of the present invention is directed to a contents distribution method for distributing a content including video and/or music data from a contents distribution apparatus to a terminal device via a network~~,~~. ~~wherein the~~ The contents distribution apparatus performs: a step of storing a content and specific data concerning a predetermined special effect to be applied to the content, where the content and the specific data ~~being~~ are stored as a pair; a step of setting management data, ~~wherein~~ where the management data at least contains a flag indicating whether or not to apply the predetermined special effect to the content during reproduction, and conditions of use which need to be satisfied in order to reproduce the content without the predetermined special effect; and a step of transmitting the

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content, the specific data, and the management data to the terminal

device, . wherein the The terminal device performs: a step of

receiving the content, the specific data, and the management data

from the contents distribution apparatus; a step of reproducing

230   the content with or without the predetermined special effect in

accordance with the specific data and the presence or absence of

the flag in the management data; and a step of resetting the flag

when the conditions of use contained in the management data are

satisfied.

235   **[0019]**   In the contents distribution method, preferably, the

specific data is special effects data which is generated based

on information concerning a type of the predetermined special

effect and a portion of the content to apply the predetermined

special effect to, . and when When the flag indicates that the

240   predetermined special effect must be applied, the step of

reproducing the content which is performed by the terminal device

reproduces the content by applying the special effects data to

the content.

[0020]   Alternatively, in the contents distribution method,

245   preferably, the specific data is attribute data consisting of

information concerning a type of the predetermined special effect

and a portion of the content to apply the predetermined special

effect to, . and when When the flag indicates that the predetermined

special effect must be applied, the step of reproducing the content

250   which is performed by the terminal device utilizes further data

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to generate special effects data in accordance with the type and the portion specified by the attribute data, where the further data being is previously stored in the terminal device for realizing special effects, and reproduces the content by applying the special

255   effects data to the content.

[0021]   In the contents distribution method, preferably, the contents distribution apparatus further performs a step of selecting, as the specific data, either special effects data which is generated based on information concerning a type of the

260   predetermined special effect and a portion of the content to apply the predetermined special effect to, or attribute data consisting of the information concerning the type and the portion, such that the special effects data is selected for said a terminal device having a relatively low processing ability and the attribute data

265   is selected for said a terminal device having a relatively high processing ability,. wherein, when When the flag indicates that the predetermined special effect must be applied, the step of reproducing the content which is performed by said the terminal device having a relatively low processing ability reproduces the

270   content by applying the special effects data to the content. and when When the flag indicates that the predetermined special effect must be applied, the step of reproducing the content which is performed by said the terminal device having a relatively high processing ability utilizes further data to generate special

275   effects data in accordance with the type and the portion specified

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by the attribute data, where the further data being is previously

stored in the terminal device for realizing special effects, and

reproduces the content by applying the special effects data to

the content.

280   **[0022]**   In this case, preferably, the step of selecting the

specific data which is performed by the contents distribution

apparatus selects the specific data to be appended to the content

based on processing ability information which is supplied from

the terminal device.

285   **[0023]**   The contents distribution apparatus may further perform

a step of storing the management data.

Moreover, the contents distribution apparatus may

further perform a step of reproducing, for confirmation, the

content with or without the predetermined special effect in

290   accordance with the flag in the management data set by the step

of setting management data.

[0024]   By applying the contents distribution method according

to the second aspect of the present invention to an existing system,

it would be possible to construct a contents distribution system

295   according to the first aspect of the present invention so as to

attain the aforementioned effects.

[0025]   A third aspect of the present invention is directed to

a contents distribution apparatus for distributing a content

including video and/or music data to a terminal device via a network.

300   comprising The contents distribution apparatus comprises: a

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content storage section operable to store a content and specific

data concerning a predetermined special effect to be applied to

the content, where the content and the specific data being are

stored as a pair; a content management data setting section operable

305 to set management data, wherein where the management data at least

contains a flag indicating whether or not to apply the predetermined

special effect to the content during reproduction, and conditions

of use which need to be satisfied in order to reproduce the content

without the predetermined special effect; and a transmission

310 section operable to transmit the content, the specific data, and

the management data to the terminal device.

[0026]   In the contents distribution apparatus, preferably, the

specific data is special effects data which is generated based

on information concerning a type of the predetermined special

315 effect and a portion of the content to apply the predetermined

special effect to.

[0027]   Alternatively, in the contents distribution apparatus,

preferably, the specific data is attribute data consisting of

information concerning a type of the predetermined special effect

320 and a portion of the content to apply the predetermined special

effect to.

[0028]   Preferably, the contents distribution apparatus

further comprises a content selection section operable to select,

as the specific data, either special effects data which is generated

325 based on information concerning a type of the predetermined special

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effect and a portion of the content to apply the predetermined special effect to, or attribute data consisting of the information concerning the type and the portion, such that the special effects data is selected for ~~said~~ a terminal device having a relatively low processing ability and the attribute data is selected for ~~said~~ a terminal device having a relatively high processing ability.

In this case, preferably, the content selection section selects the specific data to be appended to the content based on processing ability information which is supplied from the terminal device.

[0029] The contents distribution apparatus may further comprise a data storage section operable to store the management data.

Moreover, the contents distribution apparatus may further comprise a distribution content reproduction confirmation section operable to reproduce, for confirmation, the content with or without the predetermined special effect in accordance with the flag in the management data set by the content management data setting section.

[0030] These and other objects, features, aspects and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description of the present invention when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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[0031]   FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating the configuration of a contents distribution system according to one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a chart illustrating a flow of contents distribution in a contents distribution system according to one embodiment of the present invention (in the case where the terminal device has a relatively low processing ability);

FIG. 3 is a chart illustrating a flow of contents distribution in a contents distribution system according to one embodiment of the present invention (in the case where the terminal device has a relatively high processing ability);

FIG. 4 is a view showing an exemplary edition image under the control of a content management data setting section 12 shown in FIG. 1;

FIG. 5 is a block diagram illustrating an alternative structure of a contents distribution apparatus 1 employed in a contents distribution system according to one embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 6 is a chart illustrating the construction of a conventional contents distribution system and flows of contents distribution under a paid service.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0032]   FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating the configuration of a contents distribution system according to one embodiment of

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the present invention. In FIG. 1, the contents distribution system according to the present embodiment includes a contents distribution apparatus 1 (as a service provider) and a terminal device 2 (as a subscriber), which are coupled to each other via

380 a network 3. The contents distribution apparatus 1 includes a content storage section 11, a content management data setting section 12, a distribution content storage section 13, a distribution content selection section 14, and a transmission/reception section 15. The terminal device 2

385 includes a transmission/reception section 21, a distribution content storage section 22, a reproduction control section 23, a display section 24, and a processing ability information section 25.

FIGS. 2 and 3 are charts illustrating flows of contents

390 distribution in a contents distribution system according to one embodiment of the present invention.

Hereinafter, with reference to FIGS. 1 to FIG. 3, the system and method of contents distribution and the contents distribution apparatus 1 according to the present invention will

395 be described. The following description will be directed to an exemplary case where video data is distributed as a content.

[0033] First, the contents distribution apparatus 1 will be described.

The content storage section 11, which is a storage medium

400 such a hard disk, stores contents and special effects data in pairs.

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Specifically, each pair comprises a content (original content),
e.g., video data and/or music data, and special effects data for
providing a predetermined special effect(s) for that content. As
used herein, the "special effects" may be applied to an original
405   content in order to provide interesting image processing effects
and/or sound processing effects. Examples of image processing
effects, i.e., effects that can be applied to images, include mosaic
effects, monochrome effects, strobe effects, negative/positive
inversion effects, posterization effects, and color correction
410   effects. As used herein, the "special effects data" for a given
content is defined as data which is generated based on information
concerning the type of the predetermined special effect and a
portion of the content to apply the special effect to. By applying
the special effects data to an original content (which may involve
415   processing such as superimposition, substitution, and other
calculations), the predetermined special effect can be exerted
on the original content. The exact type of special effect to be
used on a content may be arbitrarily decided depending on the
substance of the content. It may also be arbitrarily decided which
420   portion of a content such a special effect will be applied to.

[0034]   In accordance with an instruction by an operator or the
like, the content management data setting section 12 obtains a
designated content from the content storage section 11, and sets
content management data. The content management data comprises
425   reproduction conditions, billing conditions, and a special effects

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flag. As used herein, the "reproduction conditions" may stipulate, for example: "conditional reproduction", under which a content can be reproduced without special effects only if a fee is paid therefor; or "unconditional reproduction", under which contents

430   can be reproduced with no special effects without paying a fee. The "billing conditions" may stipulate a fee which is required to cancel the special effect in the case of conditional reproduction. The "special effects flag" is a flag which indicates the presence or absence of special effects. For example, the special effects

435   flag may indicate with a value "1" that the content associated therewith will be reproduced with a special effect applied thereto.

[0035]   The above-described content management data may be set by an operator using an edition function as shown in FIG. 4, for example. In the exemplary case illustrated in FIG. 4, content

440   management data which stipulates payment of a fee as a requirement for reproducing an original content is being generated. An input field 41 displays the name of the designated (obtained) content. The operator in this case has inputted "conditional reproduction" in an input field 42, a special effects flag "1" in an input field

445   43, and a fee of "¥200" in an input field 44, thereby setting content management data for the designated content.

[0036]   The content, the special effects data to be appended thereto, and the content management data which has been set by means of the content management data setting section 12 are stored

450   in the distribution content storage section 13. Alternatively,

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only the content management data which has been set may be stored
in the distribution content storage section 13, separately from
the content and special effects data. In that case, the operator
does not need to newly input data in the content management data
455   setting section 12 in order to set content management data with
respect to other contents; rather, it is possible to reuse the
content management data which is already stored in the distribution
content storage section 13.

[0037]   In accordance with processing ability information
460   (described later) which is contained in a request for distribution
transmitted from the terminal device 2, the distribution content
selection section 14 selects data to be appended to a content for
transmission to the terminal device 2 from within the distribution
content storage section 13. Specifically, if the processing
465   ability information indicates that the terminal device 2 which
is to receive the distributed content is a device having a relatively
low processing ability (e.g., a mobile phone), the distribution
content selection section 14 selects the special effects data and
the content management data as the data to be appended to the content.
470   On the other hand, if the processing ability information indicates
that the terminal device 2 which is to receive the distributed
content is a device having a relatively high processing ability
(e.g., a personal computer), the distribution content selection
section 14 extracts, from the special effects data, information
475   concerning the type of the predetermined special effect and a

portion of the content to apply the special effect to (the extracted information will hereinafter be referred to as "attribute data"); then, the distribution content selection section 14 selects the extracted attribute data and the content management data as the

480   data to be appended to the content.

The transmission/reception section 15 receives a request for distribution which is transmitted from the terminal device 2. In response to the received request for distribution, the transmission/reception section 15 appends either one of the

485   special effects data or the attribute data selected by the distribution content selection section 14 and the content management data to the content for distribution, and transmits them to the terminal device 2 via the network 3 (FIGS. 2 and 3).

[0038]   Next, the terminal device 2 will be described.

490   The terminal device 2 may have a relatively high processing ability or a relatively low processing ability (defined below), and the component elements thereof function in different manners depending on the processing ability. As used herein, a "relatively high processing ability" typically refers to the

495   ability to reproduce a special effect in real time and with a high speed, as well as abundant capacity for storing data concerning special effects, etc. The threshold line between a "a relatively high processing ability" and a "a relatively low processing ability" can be arbitrarily defined depending on the purposes.

500   [0039]   (Operation of component elements of a terminal device 2

having a relatively low processing ability)

In the case of a terminal device 2 having a relatively low processing ability, the processing ability information section 25 previously stores processing ability information indicating that the terminal device 2 has a relatively low processing ability. When the reproduction of a given content is desired, the transmission/reception section 21 transmits a request for distribution of that content to the contents distribution apparatus 1, with the processing ability information stored in the processing ability information section 25 being contained in the request. Then, via the network 3, the transmission/reception section 21 receives an original content as requested, together with the associated special effects data and content management data, all of which are transmitted from the contents distribution apparatus 1 in accordance with the processing ability information of the terminal device 2. The distribution content storage section 22 stores the original content, special effects data, and content management data which have been received by the transmission/reception section 21.

Based on the special effects flag in the content management data stored in the distribution content storage section 22, the reproduction control section 23 reproduces the content as follows. If the value of the special effects flag is "1", the reproduction control section 23 applies the special effects data to the original content so that the content is reproduced with

the predetermined special effect applied thereto (FIG. 2). On the other hand, if the value of the special effects flag is "0", the reproduction control section 23 reproduces the original content with no special effects applied thereto (FIG. 2). As soon as the

530   subscriber pays the fee which is stipulated in the billing conditions, the reproduction control section 23, which has been reproducing the content with the predetermined special effect applied thereto, resets the special effects flag to "0", and thereafter reproduces the original content with no special effects

535   applied thereto. The display section 24 displays the content reproduced by the reproduction control section 23.

[0040]   (Operation of component elements of a terminal device 2 having a relatively high processing ability)

In the case of a terminal device 2 having a relatively

540   high processing ability, the processing ability information section 25 previously stores processing ability information indicating that the terminal device 2 has a relatively high processing ability. When the reproduction of a given content is desired, the transmission/reception section 21 transmits a request

545   for distribution of that content to the contents distribution apparatus 1, with the processing ability information stored in the processing ability information section 25 being contained in the request. Then, via the network 3, the transmission/reception section 21 receives an original content as requested, together

550   with the associated attribute data and content management data,

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all of which are transmitted from the contents distribution apparatus 1 in accordance with the processing ability information of the terminal device 2. The distribution content storage section 22 stores the original content, attribute data, and content

555 management data which have been received by the transmission/reception section 21.

Data which are necessary for realizing various special effects are previously stored in the reproduction control section 23 of a terminal device 2 having a relatively high processing ability.

560 Based on the special effects flag in the content management data and the attribute data stored in the distribution content storage section 22, the reproduction control section 23 reproduces the content as follows. If the value of the special effects flag is "1", the reproduction control section 23 utilizes the

565 aforementioned necessary data stored therein to generate special effects data corresponding to the type and portion specified by the attribute data, and applies the generated special effects data to the original content so that the content is reproduced with the predetermined special effect applied thereto (FIG. 3). On

570 the other hand, if the value of the special effects flag is "0", the reproduction control section 23 reproduces the original content with no special effects applied thereto (FIG. 3). As soon as the subscriber pays the fee which is stipulated in the billing conditions, the reproduction control section 23, which has been

575 reproducing the content with the predetermined special effect

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applied thereto, resets the special effects flag to "0", and thereafter reproduces the original content with no special effects applied thereto. The display section 24 displays the content reproduced by the reproduction control section 23.

580 **[0041]** As shown in FIG. 5, the above-described contents distribution apparatus 1 may be further modified to additionally include a clock signal generation section 16, a distribution content reproduction section 17, a reproduction method selection section 18, and a display section 19, whereby it becomes possible

585 to confirm the settings of the content management data at the contents distribution apparatus 1 as follows.

First, the reproduction method selection section 18 selects either a reproduction method assuming that a fee has already been paid or a reproduction method assuming that a fee has not

590 been paid yet. In synchronization with a clock signal, i.e., time information which is outputted from the clock signal generation section 16, the distribution content reproduction section 17 reproduces the content for distribution which is stored in the distribution content storage section 13. Specifically, in the

595 case where the reproduction method assuming that a fee has already been paid is selected, the distribution content reproduction section 17 reproduces the relevant content with no special effects applied thereto. On the other hand, in the case where the reproduction method assuming that a fee has not been paid yet is

600 selected, the distribution content reproduction section 17

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reproduces the relevant content with a predetermined special effect applied thereto. In either case, the reproduced content is displayed by the display section 19.

[0042] Thus, in the system and method of contents distribution according to one embodiment of the present invention, an original content and special effects data associated with the original content are separately prepared, and the original content and the special effects are distributed to the terminal device 2 together with content management data which includes a special effects flag indicating whether or not to apply a special effect when the content is reproduced. As a result, the utility of memory resources in the contents distribution apparatus 1 can be improved. In addition, the utility of communication resources on the part of the terminal device 2 can be improved because, once a content is received, it is possible to reproduce the content with or without a special effect as stipulated.

Since the contents distribution apparatus 1 can append either special effects data or attribute data to an original content for distribution in accordance with the processing ability of the terminal device 2, it is possible to construct an efficient contents distribution system even if the system includes terminal devices 2 having different processing abilities with respect to special effects.

[0043] By additionally incorporating a clock signal generation section 16, a distribution content reproduction section 17, a

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reproduction method selection section 18, and a display section

19 in the contents distribution apparatus 1 as described above,

it becomes possible to confirm how a content will be reproduced

in accordance with the content management data which has been set

630   by means of the content management data setting section 12.

Furthermore, by only storing the content management data

which has been set by means of the content management data setting

section 12 in the distribution content storage section 13, it

becomes possible to allow the content management data to be easily

635   reused for other contents as well.

[0044]   Although the above-described embodiment illustrates an

example where the content management data comprises reproduction

conditions, billing conditions, and a special effects flag, the

content management data may optionally comprise, for example,

640   "copying conditions" which stipulate whether or not a content may

be copied to another hard disk after distribution.

Although the above-described embodiment illustrates an

example where processing ability information is supplied from the

terminal device 2 to the contents distribution apparatus 1, it

645   would be unnecessary to supply the processing ability information

in the case where the processing ability of the terminal device

to which a content is distributed is known in advance based on

an address of the terminal device or the like.

In   the   above-described   embodiment,   the   contents

650   distribution   apparatus   1   is   illustrated   as   comprising   the

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distribution content selection section 14. However, the
distribution content selection section 14 may be omitted by
ensuring that special effects data is stored in the distribution
content storage section 13 if all of the terminal devices 2 composing
655 the system have a relatively low processing ability, and that
attribute data is stored in the distribution content storage
section 13 if all of the terminal devices 2 composing the system
have a relatively high processing ability.

[0045]   While the invention has been described in detail, the
660 foregoing description is in all aspects illustrative and not
restrictive. It is understood that numerous other modifications
and variations can be devised without departing from the scope
of the invention.

ABSTRACT ~~OF THE DISCLOSURE~~

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~~There is provided a~~A system and method of contents distribution~~,~~ which ~~realizes~~ realize an efficient use of the memory resources within a contents distribution apparatus and the communication resources on the part of a terminal device are

670 provided. A content storage section ~~11~~ stores contents, such as video data, ~~-~~and information concerning predetermined special effects to be applied thereto in pairs. A content management data setting section ~~12~~ sets information such as reproduction conditions~~,~~ and billing conditions, and a special effects flag with respect

675 to each content. A distribution content storage section ~~13~~ stores the contents and information associated therewith. A distribution content selection section ~~14~~ selects information to be appended to a content for transmission in accordance with processing ability information which is supplied from a terminal

680 device ~~2~~. The content and the selected information are transmitted to the terminal device ~~2~~ via transmission/reception sections ~~15,~~ ~~21~~ and a network ~~3~~, so as to be stored in a distribution content storage section ~~22~~. A reproduction control section ~~23~~ reproduces the content according to the presence or absence of the special

685 effects flag in the stored information.